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GLORIA MOLINA HONORS SANDRA FIGUEROA-VILLA AS FIRST DISTRICT 'WOMAN OF THE YEAR'

**Award to El Centro del Pueblo CEO Recognizes Decades of Service to
Thousands of Families in Echo Park and Surrounding Areas**

LOS ANGELES (March 12, 2012)—Los Angeles County Supervisor Gloria Molina honored El Centro del Pueblo CEO Sandra Figueroa-Villa as the First District “Woman of the Year” at this afternoon’s Los Angeles County Commission for Women 27th Annual “Women of the Year” Luncheon, held in the Crystal Room of the historic Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles.

“For over 30 years, Sandra Figueroa-Villa has fought for social justice – and under her thoughtful guidance, El Centro del Pueblo has become a beacon of hope for generations of families,” said Supervisor Gloria Molina. “Yet despite the relentless demands on her time, Sandra never fails to lend her talents to other emerging non-profit agencies. She is a true role model and inspiration to all of us, and we proudly honor her today.”

Currently a resident of Eagle Rock, Sandra Figueroa-Villa was born and raised in South Los Angeles. Her community activism began in her teens and continued while she attended Cal State Los Angeles.

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In 1980, Sandra Figueroa-Villa was appointed Executive Director of El Centro del Pueblo, a multi-services non-profit agency in Echo Park. The organization was specifically created to assist at-risk children, youth and families. Services include counseling, employment, job training, housing, post-secondary education, substance abuse prevention, legal services, literacy classes, child abuse prevention, crisis intervention services, AIDS education and recreational activities for youth.

When Figueroa-Villa assumed the helm of El Centro del Pueblo, the agency was in thousands of dollars of debt with no solution in sight. Under Figueroa-Villa's strong management, the organization's finances steadily improved and El Centro del Pueblo evolved into a highly respected, comprehensive resource for Northeast Los Angeles families.

By 2003, El Centro del Pueblo was financially stable, and the agency renovated a 30,000 square foot facility – formerly a public parking garage – into a recreational building for local youth. The \$4.8 million project was paid off two years later. In 2007, El Centro del Pueblo embarked on a second successful capital campaign by renovating their Children, Youth and Families Center for a \$3 million total cost.

"It was New Year's Eve when I was notified by Supervisor Molina that she would be honoring me as 'Woman of the Year,' and that's when I knew 2012 was going to be wonderful," said Sandra Figueroa-Villa. "I feel so overwhelmed being honored by Supervisor Molina. She is the pioneer. She is the one who broke barriers to make my work easier to do. So to be recognized by someone who was at the forefront is just so special to me."

El Centro del Pueblo is located at 1157 Lemoyne Street in Los Angeles, California 90026. Families wishing to obtain services should call (213) 483-6335.

(Photographs from today's luncheon and awards ceremony are available upon request.)

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